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Identical letters dated 25 January 2017 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council

On instructions from my Government, I should like to convey to you the position of the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic regarding the thirty-fifth report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015) and 2332 (2016) (S/2017/58).

The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic reaffirms the points that it has already made in previous responses to reports of the Secretary-General regarding implementation of the aforementioned Security Council resolutions. It hopes that the incoming Secretariat will adopt an approach consistent with its mandate, one that is professional and objective and takes into consideration the concerns and comments of the Syrian Government. It hopes that the Secretariat's reports will boldly and objectively address the core reasons why the delivery of humanitarian assistance to Syrians in need has been hampered. Those reasons include certain States' ongoing support for terrorism in Syria and the imposition of illegal unilateral economic measures on the country.

The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic wishes to emphasize the following points:

1. The Syrian Government stresses that it is the primary and biggest provider of humanitarian support to its citizens. The efforts of the United Nations and international actors to provide humanitarian assistance could not be successful without the facilitation provided by the Syrian Government.

2. In the coming period, the United Nations' efforts to provide humanitarian assistance to Syrians will be successful primarily to the extent that it understands that Syrian Government is the party that has the interests, security and prosperity of the Syrian people closest at heart. The Syrian Government is fulfilling its constitutional and legal duty by defending its people against the terrorist organizations Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), the Nusrah Front and associated entities and terrorist operatives with numerous names and allegiances. That considerable effort on the part of the Syrian Government is the fundamental prerequisite for United Nations humanitarian operations to prove successful. That

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much became very clear after the city of Aleppo was liberated from armed terrorist groups. Security and stability improved in the city and for tens of thousands of Syrians in the eastern and western neighbourhoods. Thousands of displaced persons were able to return to their homes, humanitarian assistance reached those who needed it, and work began in order to rebuild and restore what the terrorists had destroyed.

3. The Syrian Government is committed to the cessation of hostilities agreement that entered into force on 30 December 2016. The armed terrorist groups have continued to violate the agreement. They have carried out suicide attacks in several areas, including Damascus, and have fired shells and other projectiles at civilians in numerous cities and governorates.

4. The Syrian Government reiterates that in the course of carrying out its far-reaching counter-terrorism efforts, it has complied fully with the provisions of international law and international humanitarian law regarding the protection and security of civilians and the safety of civilian service facilities, such as hospitals and schools.

5. The Syrian Government stresses that the Secretariat should cautiously assess the sources of its information. Regrettably, previous reports have relied on a media centre in Britain and on other sources that are politicized and have no credibility, as their primary concern is to direct criticism and false allegations at the Syrian Government and its allies. The reports produced by the Secretariat and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) have, unfortunately, been a far cry from the truth and the facts. Instead, they have relied on lies and allegations spread by armed terrorist groups and the regional and foreign parties that support and protect them, and by artificial entities such as the so-called White Helmets.

6. The authors should avoid committing the legal and moral error of using the term "non-State armed groups" to describe terrorist groups that have been listed as such by the United Nations. These include the Nusrah Front, ISIL and associated entities. The Secretariat plays a pivotal role in condemning the crimes committed against Syrians by foreign terrorist fighters. The latter were brought in via Turkish territory with the support of the Erdoğan regime. They are funded by Qatar and Saudi Arabia, armed by the Americans and Europeans, and imbued with an extremist Wahhabist ideology founded on hate, negation of the other and a thirst for blood.

7. With regard to the humanitarian situation in Aleppo governorate, the Syrian Government has coordinated with its allies on a number of initiatives that are consistent with international humanitarian law, with a view to securing the departure of civilians from neighbourhoods in eastern Aleppo. It has called on the armed terrorist groups to lay down their arms or leave in order to forestall harm to civilians or to public or private property. Crossing points and other facilities have been set up for that purpose, and guarantees have been provided. Nevertheless, the armed terrorist groups have taken to using civilians as human shields, stopped them from leaving, and fired their bullets of hate and missiles of death at any who try to escape to areas under Government control. The armed groups have suppressed the pleas and protests of the people, and have continued to launch attacks at neighbourhoods in western Aleppo, killing and injuring thousands of civilians. The Syrian State has

been left with no choice but to liberate its citizens, reclaim its territory and stand up to terrorism. With the support of its friends, it has scored a historic success by liberating civilians in neighbourhoods in eastern Aleppo and expelling the terrorists.

8. The Syrian Government notes that the vast majority of civilians who left the eastern neighbourhoods of Aleppo city have headed for the western neighbourhoods, which are controlled by the Syrian State. This shows that those civilians believe in the Syrian Government's efforts to support and protect them from terrorism. The figures provided by the Special Envoy and by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs have proved not to be credible, and are wholly exaggerated.

9. During the period from 26 November to 14 December 2016, neighbourhoods in western Aleppo took in over 100,000 people from eastern Aleppo. The Syrian Government has provided medical services to some 23,000 patients who had been deprived of medical care and medicine by the armed terrorist groups. It has enrolled more than 1,150 pupils from families arriving from neighbourhoods in eastern Aleppo in schools opened in housing centres in western Aleppo for young children and pupils to resume their educations. Assistance provided by the United Nations in Aleppo amounts to no more than 22 per cent of needs. Throughout, the Government has continued to assist and support the people of Aleppo in cooperation with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent and other partners. The Syrian Government is determined to rebuild what the terrorists have destroyed, enable the people of Aleppo to return to their homes and provide them with basic services. The Syrian Government stands ready to cooperate with United Nations organizations to deliver humanitarian assistance immediately to the eastern neighbourhoods of Aleppo, and there is no excuse for the United Nations to refrain from fulfilling its humanitarian functions.

10. Now that eastern Aleppo has been liberated, the authorities there have discovered large warehouses full of international food and medical aid that was appropriated by the armed terrorist groups and not allowed to reach those in need, whose suffering was exploited for base purposes. Those facts give the lie to the allegations that certain parties have levelled at the Syrian Government regarding the causes of the suffering and deprivation to which the people of eastern Aleppo are being subjected.

11. The Syrian Government rejects the way in which the reports of the Secretariat have applied the concept of protection. The latter is the responsibility of the sovereign Syrian State. Member States and international organizations, including the United Nations, must respect and comply with that principle. They must bring pressure to bear on those States that have violated the rights of Syrians by using terrorism as a means to fulfil their aims and their political interests.

12. With regard to the recent agreements aimed at ensuring that civilians can leave Aleppo and the towns of Fu'ah and Kafraya in Idlib governorate, the Syrian Government draws the Secretariat's attention to the fact that the terrorist groups, foremost among them the Nusrah Front — Conquest of the Levant, have violated other agreements to facilitate the evacuation of Aleppo and the two towns. They have also committed torture, carried out abductions and set fire to evacuation convoys. The Syrian Government is surprised that the United Nations has not made any noteworthy effort to rescue the inhabitants of Fu'ah and Kafraya, despite the

crimes committed by terrorist organizations, which have besieged them and denied access to humanitarian assistance. Syria warns that hunger and terrorism could cause a genuine catastrophe in those two towns.

13. During the period covered by the report, the Syrian Government facilitated the evacuation of numerous medical cases and provided humanitarian assistance to Syrian towns and cities without discrimination. The Syrian Government is astonished by the Secretariat's failure to mention the obstruction by armed terrorist groups, particularly those besieging the towns of Fu'ah and Kafraya, of the delivery of humanitarian assistance and the evacuation of medical cases.

14. The Syrian Government emphasizes that the Secretariat must exercise due caution when reporting the facts regarding the events in Syria and their effect on the humanitarian situation of Syrians. For instance, the reports of the Secretariat ought to point out that the armed terrorist groups deployed in the Wadi Barada area of Rif Dimashq governorate, foremost among them the Nusrah Front, have committed a despicable crime by cutting off the supply of water, especially drinking water, from millions of Syrians in the city of Damascus. In so doing, the armed terrorist groups have used civilians' daily living needs as a political bargaining chip against the Government and people of Syria. This was hardly an unprecedented act; it was part of a pattern of criminal behaviour that has been observed in recent years in such governorates as Damascus, Aleppo and Dar'a. It amounts to a war crime and a crime against humanity. The manner in which certain United Nations officials denounced those actions was shameful: it verged on a defence of the armed groups.

15. The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic hosted the United Nations Headquarters Board of Inquiry into the attack on the humanitarian assistance convoy that took place in Urum al-Kubra on 19 September 2016. It provided the required clarifications, explanations and evidence regarding the terrorist attack on the convoy. However, the Board of Inquiry included in its report a set of spurious and false claims without evidence or factual basis. The Board reached its conclusions on the basis of such allegations and conjecture. Indeed, it took it upon itself to defend and cover for certain parties. That approach is completely at odds with its mandate. The Syrian Government will soon provide the Security Council and the General Assembly with a detailed response on the topic, which is beyond the scope of the present letter.

16. The reports of the Secretariat should refer to the catastrophic effects of the operations carried out by the so-called international coalition led by the United States of America, which was established outside the framework of international law and was not authorized by the Security Council or requested by the Syrian Government. Those operations have claimed civilian and military lives and caused appalling destruction of infrastructure and oil and gas wells. The Syrian Government has documented the massive losses of life and services infrastructure as a result of coalition air strikes. It has sent dozens of identical letters on the topic to the Security Council and the Secretariat.

17. The United Nations should fulfil its mandate by providing information on the considerable suffering of the Syrian people and the extensive impact of the ongoing coercive unilateral economic measures taken against Syria by the United States and the European Union. Those measures are a flagrant violation of the

resolutions of the United Nations, which provide that unilateral economic measures are illegal and should be rescinded.

18. The Syrian Government finds it objectionable that the Secretariat continues to promote the cross-border delivery of assistance, even though it is clear that such delivery is ineffective and that most of the assistance thus delivered falls into the hands of armed terrorist groups in the targeted areas. The same applies to the promotion of cross-border vaccination campaigns, whose importance has been overstated. Those campaigns have led to the deaths of several children owing to vaccines that were tainted or administered by non-specialists. The notifications sent to the Syrian Government do not meet the minimum standard of credibility with regard to figures, data, number of beneficiaries and information on the parties that receive and distribute assistance to civilian beneficiaries. In that connection, the Syrian Government reiterates that the United Nations monitoring mechanism cannot verify that cross-border assistance is reaching its rightful beneficiaries, and has thus far proven to be incapable of doing so. We remind you that the Bab al-Hawa, Bab al-Salamah and Ramtha crossings are entry points for arms, materiel and ammunition being smuggled to armed terrorist groups in Syria. The Syrian Arab Red Crescent stands ready to monitor the delivery of humanitarian assistance to its intended recipients, but the Secretariat has in the past rejected that proposal.

19. The Syrian Government emphasizes that the armed terrorist groups are responsible for the continued suffering of the Palestine refugees in the Yarmouk camp and in other areas, and that the terrorist organization ISIL has for some months prevented humanitarian assistance from reaching several areas.

20. The United Nations should verify its information and endeavour to update it continuously when drafting its reports. To date, the number of foreign non-governmental organizations operating in Syria is 25. Those organizations have the facilities necessary to carry out their work. As of 31 October 2016, the Syrian Government had approved 1,100 entry visas for United Nations staff. In December, it approved 26 entry visas for United Nations staff (not 18) and 77 renewal requests (not 65 as stated in the report).

21. The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic reaffirms its long-standing position that the crisis in Syria requires a political solution based on dialogue among Syrians under Syrian leadership without foreign intervention and without preconditions. The Syrian Government stresses that it is fighting terrorism with a view to reaching a political solution. We remind the Secretariat that the success of the political process and any significant improvement in the humanitarian situation will depend, above all, on creating a climate conducive to a serious and non-politicized international and regional commitment to fighting terrorism and on an immediate end to the unilateral coercive economic measures being imposed on the Syrian people with no legal or moral basis. The outcomes of the meeting held in Astana on 23 and 24 January 2017 underscore the constructive role of the Syrian Government in facilitating the meeting.

22. The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic reiterates its call on the Security Council to prevail on those States that support and finance armed terrorist groups to refrain from doing so, in implementation of the relevant Security Council resolutions on combating terrorism and terrorist financing, particularly resolutions 2170 (2014), 2178 (2014), 2199 (2015) and 2253 (2015). Compliance with and

enforcement of those resolutions is the key to resolving the situation in Syria and delivering an unprecedented amount of humanitarian assistance to those in need in Syria.

I should be grateful if the present letter could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Mounzer **Mounzer**
Chargé d'affaires a.i